



## Students as partners change programme compendium 2012-13

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# Students as partners change programme 2012-13

An overview of the programme, participating institutions and case studies

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## Introduction, aims and purpose

The Higher Education White Paper<sup>1</sup> (BIS 2011) placed students at the 'heart of the system'. This means that students should be partners actively engaged in the enhancement of their university's approach to learning<sup>2</sup>, including curriculum design, implementation and quality assurance. The Higher Education Academy's (HEA) recent experience indicates that student engagement in the design of their learning experiences is becoming more significant and widespread through institutional initiatives such as [Student Academic Partners](#)<sup>3</sup>, [Student as Producer](#)<sup>4</sup> and [Student as Change Agents](#)<sup>5</sup>.

This programme was run in partnership with Birmingham City University (BCU) and informed by BCU's Student Academic Partners initiative. It was aimed at institutions that are committed to developing and implementing an institutional change initiative through a partnership between students and staff. The aims of the programme were to:

- develop the capacity of students to play a substantive role in transformative change;
- enable HE providers to develop methods of involving students in institutional change more rigorously;
- build institutional capacity for student engagement and help institutions become more student-centred in their culture and approach to learning and teaching.

A distinctive feature of the programme is that participating teams comprised at least 50% students, with appropriate representation from academic staff and/or senior managers.

The programme consisted of the following key events:

- Start-up meeting – 14 June 2012
- Two-day residential – 27-28 September 2012
- Final meeting – 26 February 2013

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<sup>1</sup> BIS (2011) Higher Education White Paper: Students at the Heart of the System

<sup>2</sup> Million+ (2012) Teaching that Matters

<sup>3</sup> <http://www2.bcu.ac.uk/celt/forming-learning-partnerships/sap>

<sup>4</sup> <http://studentasproducer.lincoln.ac.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> [http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/educationenhancementprojects/current\\_projects/change/](http://as.exeter.ac.uk/support/educationenhancementprojects/current_projects/change/)

## Participating institutions

The following institutions took part in the programme. The next section provides a summary of each team's initiative and a link to a case study where available. The case studies can also be viewed as a collective in the final section of this publication. Click on an institution name to jump to a summary.

- [Birmingham City University](#)
- [Kingston University](#)
- [Liverpool John Moores University](#)
- [Manchester Metropolitan University](#)
- [Newman University, Birmingham](#)
- [Sheffield Hallam University](#)
- [Swansea Metropolitan University & University of Wales: Trinity Saint David](#)
- [University of Oxford](#)
- [University of Ulster](#)
- [University of Wales Newport](#)

This project seeks to develop our notion that the traditional framework of capturing student opinion needs repurposing into a modern, flexible and accessible process that occurs all the time rather than at set points through the University's meeting calendar; relaxing the traditional model of rigid, formal quality assurance orientated structures. We feel that a key component in the move from quality assurance towards quality enhancement is a change to the culture, makeup and role of the students informing the University of their opinion outside of formal frameworks such as Boards of Studies and Course committees. To this end we hope to use students and the student voice as a mechanism in changing our culture to enable a wider range of student conversations within the whole quality enhancement and student feedback debate.

At BCU we are now discussing the notion of maximising the occurrence of and providing feedback from 'accidental collisions' between students and the institution and by making 'informal conversations normal' where student interaction and engagement occurs all the time in and out of classrooms a valid way of engaging with the student voice. This project will form a key aspect of process we are on of seeking new opportunities to garner student opinion and student direction and relaxing the traditionally held Students' Union views on formal student representation and democracy.

Team leader – Paul Chapman

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)

This scheme which is a joint venture between the university's Academic Development Centre and the Students' Union aims to encourage staff and students to undertake educational and pedagogic research with the purpose of improving the academic experience of students at the university.

This work will encourage collaboration between staff and students, enabling students to both provide a perspective on how the student experience might be improved but also to undertake paid research in an academic environment. Successful applicants to the scheme will be invited to join the ADC Academic Associates Learning Community.

The Students' Union believes that by engaging students and staff together in research, a better educational experience can be provided to the student body.

This scheme is designed to develop a culture of collaboration between students and staff at a grass roots level, giving individual students and staff an opportunity to make a positive change to the learning experience at Kingston. This scheme is part of a wider effort to build a partnership that ensures that students and staff are equal, engaged partners in an academic community that drives forward learning, teaching, research and innovation.

Team leader – Michael Hill

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)

'Student Engagement' is a joint institution/student union initiative which aims to create a partnership culture to ensure that students are engaged in every aspect of their experience. It is designed to put student engagement at the heart of everything that we do.

The initiative focusses on students' learning experience and employability skills, and also aims to transform approaches to curriculum development, student scholarship and students' involvement with University policies and governance. Increased staff engagement is also an objective of the initiative.

The initiative consists of several strands, all of which will be developed by staff/student partnerships, mainly, but not exclusively, through a series of projects which will enable students, staff-student teams and external clients to identify and propose areas for development. Successful proposals will be facilitated and supported using a partnership approach, and the outcomes shared.

The 'Change Liverpool' project, which is a key part of the initiative, will give our students a real work based learning experience as well as the chance to work in partnership with the university.

Team leader – Jackie Gresham

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)

MMU staff and students have worked together very productively particularly in the last few years so that there are many areas of good practice: a student rep conference was organised by the university for the first time this year; a very successful staff awards scheme is in its third year of operation; students now have places on standing panels for programme review and approval processes; the student voice is heard in many ways for instance, via termly student union reports which are regularly received by all staff. However, student voice in curriculum design itself is still an under-developed area. Our Students' Union would like us to move from 'consultation' to 'empowerment', with course reps taking responsibility for some parts of the curriculum development process.

We know that students often think that they could organise their own courses better: we want to harness their inside knowledge into a more meaningful engagement with course development and planning. Working with a programme team which is undertaking periodic review in 2012/13, our project aims to find ways to embed students more closely in the development than simply asking what they think of the finished product.

Team leader – Rachel Forsyth

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)



This project is designed to be a first step in extending existing student engagement practice within Newman University College. Taking a successful student engagement model from psychology and counselling, this project intends to pilot expanding this model into another discipline: Working with Children Young People and Families (WCYPF). The original model involved students creating a research methods resource page for use by other students in a curriculum enhancement and development project. These original project students will mentor the new student team within WCYPF to develop their own research methods resource page.

The extension of an existing project in one-subject area to a different discipline allows us to gain a better idea of challenges faced within different disciplines in working with students as partners. We are aware that a project that has worked well on one area may not necessarily do so in another. Our experience of such challenges and solutions can be disseminated across the sector.

We hope that other institutions will also be interested in the creative approaches that students have shown in developing research methods materials and will consider how far their own provision differs from these resources.

Team leader – Julie Blackwell Young

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)

Sheffield Hallam University is always seeking to move beyond the minimum in capturing the 'student voice', desiring meaningful student engagement beyond the confines of traditional mechanisms, such as student surveys and student course/faculty representation processes. The institution does not only want to see students as producers of research knowledge. It also seeks students to be change agents (Fielding 2001). The question the institution wants to address is how to actively involve students in the curriculum design and approval process. Addressing this question is timely as the institution is currently implementing a new Academic Quality Framework, which encompasses a new course design and approval process. While this new process calls for student involvement, it demands innovative action where students are empowered to contribute. This is where further questions are posed such as:

- To what extent is it realistic and desirable to expect students to be directly involved in formal curriculum design processes, including being mandatory members of a design team?
- How can students be encouraged, rewarded and recognised for contributing to curriculum design?
- What are the practical and ethical implications for managing and sharing student module evaluations and other feedback on curricula?

The uniqueness of participating in this change programme is the emphasis on student-staff collaboration. Due to this, we are confident that participation in this programme will not only address a gap in knowledge in our own course design and approval process, but also addresses a gap in knowledge in the sector.

**Team leader – Manuel Madriaga**

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)

## Swansea Metropolitan University & University of Wales: Trinity Saint David

### Students as partners in a transformed university

In October 2012 Swansea Metropolitan University and the University of Wales: Trinity St David will come together to create a new University for South West Wales. The integration brings the opportunity to look afresh at existing structures and practices in two institutions, to build on historic strengths, to learn from best practice elsewhere in the sector and hence to seek to create arrangements for the new University that are both innovative and fit-for-purpose.

Within this strategic context, the project is designed to enable students and staff to work in partnership with two principal aims:

- to create and establish an appropriate student representative structure, and associated supporting mechanisms, for the Transformed University. This will involve, for example, exploring methods of enhancing and sustaining genuine student engagement in institutional decision-making and change, building on the good practice disseminated through the Wales Initiative for Student Engagement (WISE); and methods of including students who have, traditionally, proved difficult to engage in institutional decision-making – distance learners, part-time students, taught postgraduate students, and students studying at partner colleges;
- to identify and map out future methods for securing high levels of student engagement in the enhancement of their learning in the Transformed University.

The outcomes of the project are expected to be:

- a strong and sustainable structure for student representation in the Transformed University, designed by students and staff working in partnership;
- a plan of action in respect of consolidating and securing future student engagement as partners in the enhancement of their learning.

Team leader – Nick Potter

The overall aim of this project will be to embed a new skills training programme in an established MSc course. The project will develop essential practical public health skills for students undertaking a masters in Global Health Science and develop the teaching skills of doctoral (DPhil) students.

The skills gained by all students will enhance their prospects of future employment. The programme will enable new teaching methods to be introduced to the MSc and enhance working relationships between students and staff.

The programme will focus on developing MSc students' team working, writing, oral presentation and analytical skills. It will build on existing work and further develop the teaching and learning skills of their 'near-peers' (doctoral students) by collaborating with them to develop and deliver the new curriculum. The doctoral students will have recently undertaken the MSc and are thus ideally placed to participate in MSc curriculum development. Furthermore developing teaching skills is an integral part of their training for a career in research.

Team Leader – Emma Plugge

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)

At Ulster, it is proposed that student engagement should adopt a two-staged approach, firstly the engagement of students in the curriculum, i.e. in their learning, with the focus targeted at first year engagement and then secondly, the engagement of students in shaping the design and delivery of the curriculum. The importance of support for student transition is recognised and this is not confined to transition from secondary to tertiary education but equally important as students move between different levels of learning.

The University currently has a Transition Policy and a First Year Undergraduate Teaching Policy which provides guidance to staff in these areas but in order to support transformative change, it is now timely that staff and students revisit these policies together to promote the engagement in the curriculum discussed above.

Within the scope of this project, one of the initial outputs could be the production of a guide for first year students on 'becoming a learner in higher education'. This could be used at induction sessions and in other studies advice sessions with students in first year, in order to enhance their learning experience in an effective and timely manner. A corresponding resource for staff could be developed which provides guidance and support on facilitating student engagement through active and collaborative learning. This would provide tangible resources for staff and students and a methodology for further engagement through the different levels. It would also provide a platform whereby the next stage of engagement, building on the initiatives already undertaken with the Students' Union, could be further developed.

Team Leader – Roisin Curran

[A case study of this initiative is available below – click here to jump to it](#)

This project provides the means through which Newport University's Student Union and Student Services department will re-define their traditional relationship and practice by jointly developing systems and focus to enhance the accessibility and relevance of advice, guidance and advocacy available for students. By working closely together, the Student Union and Student Services will be better able to define the boundaries of advice, guidance and advocacy and so maintain the independent practice of the Sabbatical Officers while enhancing the relevance of Students Services provision.

By defining "at risk students" as those whose emotional resilience, health or behaviour impacts on their ability to progress with their studies, the emerging themes for the project centre on:

- Enhanced student engagement in the due process that regulates academic rigour and progressions, particularly Academic Appeal, Unfair Practice, Extenuating Circumstances, Student Complaints, Disciplinary Fitness to Study
- Establishing the operational systems, understanding and mutual skill sets to maintain the independence of advocacy while ensuring the accessibility of pastoral support, information, advice and guidance
- Enhancing the resilience and effectiveness of Sabbatical and Student Services staff when managing high risk student situations relating to emotional distress, suicide and assault

Combining the professional experience of Student Services staff with the contemporary focus and political voice of Student Union, this project presents an opportunity to develop practice and systems that relate to some of the most challenging aspects of the student experience. In so doing, the systems and practice that support at risk students will become more relevant and accessible and effective and will enhance student retention and progression.

Team leader – Simon Phillips

# Case studies

## New student conversations: From QA to QE

Birmingham City University

### Introduction

The idea behind this initiative is to expand the opportunities for the student voice beyond traditional higher education quality systems, with the aim of offering greater representation of student opinion. By broadening the mechanisms for capturing the student voice we wish to build upon the existing 'Partners for Success' agenda at Birmingham City University (BCU).

We recognised that continued student representation was an important mechanism for the delivery of the student voice and that student involvement in quality mechanisms has a positive influence on the overall student educational experience (Gibbs, 2012). However, Birmingham City University Students' Union (BCUSU) felt that existing structures, and accompanying cultures, often support an out-dated, predominantly linear process, which does not provide a complete vehicle for creating change in today's higher education institution. Aside from this, there has been a significant change in the role students' play on campus (Bovill et al., 2011) and a major shift in the learning community agenda at BCU developing the relationship between staff and students (Chapman et al., 2013). Wider within the sector there is growing drive for students to be more deeply involved in institutional governance and decision making (Buckley, 2013) and at the same time, external work by the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) has refocused the work of student engagement and the involvement of students in shaping their own learning experience.

BCU has a diverse student population that is currently split geographically over eight campuses and supported through remote organisational structures. This helps perpetuate an inconsistent approach to core institutional systems and processes resulting in a varied student experience through a 'one size solution fits all' representative and feedback structures.

Feedback from those students within the project team suggested that they 'felt there are too many mechanisms and that there is confusion' around providing feedback to the institution yet they wanted to sense that 'the student voice is valued'. Experiences of student representatives suggested that there is an imbalance to the role of staff and students on course committees and boards of studies and that the student voice was a 'minor partner' in those meetings. Within the Union's strategic plan developed in 2011/12 the student voice became a core theme with associated goals of:

- We will establish a Data Bank of Student Opinion to inform and influence.
- We will facilitate integrated, connected, consistent student representatives at all levels which influences positive change.

With this backdrop, BCUSU wanted to reinvigorate the student representative framework, ensuring that 'student reps' were supported and effective within formal governance feedback processes. Supported by a growing ethos of student engagement at the heart of the University alongside a new strategic vision of the Students' Union to become more relevant and to impact on every student at BCU, this project offered an appropriate vehicle for a joint team staff and students to test different student voice approaches with students at the heart of designing and delivering interventions. The approach we took within this 'Students as Partners' programme, is a model of the way we increasingly work at BCU and was a natural evolution of our journey towards enhancing the student experience (Brand et al. 2013). This approach can be seen in the publication on student engagement practices at BCU titled Student Engagement: Identity, Community and Motivation (Nygaard et al. 2013).

## **Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance**

This project wanted to establish a series of student voice activities within quality systems embedding how student opinion could be used to bring about change instead of solely relying on traditional “representation” routes. BCU has a growing partnership with its Students’ Union on a variety of student engagement activities and recognises that students are collaborative partners within their own learning experience. The natural progression of this approach is developing the role of students within a wider agenda at university by becoming key participants in decision making, institutional governance and as ‘agents of change’ (Dunne and Zandstra, 2011)

By developing meaningful roles for students and by providing the opportunity to become active participants in both quality assurance and enhancement activities we hoped to allow for the integration of both the individual and the collective student voice within institutional change.

Alongside this, the project team knew there was a growing evidence base of localised good practice and wanted to harness what was out there and share wider and at the same time establish procedures in which to ‘close the feedback loop’ and share with students the impact the student voice is having.

The project initially had four broad aims and whilst finer detail evolved through the process, the fundamental objectives remained the same:

1. Develop a joint student and staff steering group for student engagement which would create a framework to encourage student voice activities and continue the drive towards Quality Enhancement as opposed to Quality Assurance
2. Develop an evaluative position statement that suggests ways to review and repurpose the traditional routes of student representation and suggest appropriate alternatives
3. Develop an operational model for collecting the outputs of student conversations and engagement activity across the University to capture and maximise the impact of student conversations and influence the student learning experience
4. Articulate a collection of student engagement case studies to showcase with stakeholders and influence developments

With student and staff collaboration at the core we aimed to:

- Continually develop the learning community
- Embed students at the heart of the design and delivery of key projects on campus
- Support the evolution of students adopting different roles within their own learning experience
- Widen the ability and opportunity to capture collective student opinion and feedback within, and on top of, student representation structures for organisational change (Carey, 2012)

## **Approaches and activities developed**

Throughout the timeframe of the project the student voice was constant and guided our approach. The project team offered a cross section of the University and the Students’ Union and included students who were both engaged in wider University activity and those that would define themselves as non-engaged. Over the course of the project the team consisted of:

- President – Students’ Union
- Pro-Vice Chancellor for Student Satisfaction – University (first 6 months only)
- Head of Engagement – Students’ Union and Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT)
- Faculty Associate Dean for Student Experience – University



- Engaged Undergraduate Student through student employment
- Non-Engaged Postgraduate Student
- Undergraduate School and Faculty Student Representative
- Student Communications Officer – University
- Representation Coordinator – Students' Union

In line with the belief that there was a growing body of localised activity within student voice outside of well-established structures the project team audited the university in terms of current practice. This audit involved key stakeholders within student engagement and student communication processes from each level of the organisation. This created rather a large and complicated map showing:

- Disparate student voice activity at each level of the organisation from senior executive level through to front-line student facing services and academic activity
- Emergent, faculty based student engagement and student voice activity with and without
- links to central student voice leadership by the Students' Union
- Mixed levels of resources stimulating, supporting and developing student voice activity
- Duplication of activity from school to school, faculty to faculty
- A lack of 'linkage' between student voice collection, analysis and action
- A lack of monitoring and reporting on actions from student voice activity
- A lack of 'closing the loop' and feeding back to students and staff of the action and impact
- arising from the student voice
- The prevalence of face-to-face interaction supported by paper based organisation

Our approach then developed a 'four P' model to further structure our interventions:

**Philosophy** – Determine the philosophy, ethos and value set of what we are trying to achieve and why.

**People** – Who are the key gatekeepers and champions involved? Where are they and how do we engage with them? Can we identify any blockers or barriers? How can we empower both staff and students to be more creative in their quality systems?

**Policy** – What supporting documents currently exist? What may need to be created in order to support our vision? How can we align activities with strategic and operational plans?

**Process** – Are structures, systems and processes fit for purpose? What may need to change?

**Projects** – Can we identify those activities that are underway, which support this project?

Can we 'piggyback', complement or join up projects? Can we identify new projects that allow us to maximise resources and avoid duplication?

**Pilots** – Can we trial certain approaches in areas which will allow us to test our objectives and offer feedback?

From this we developed two diagrams that supported our initial findings. **Diagram one** depicts the more traditional relationship with more formal, traditional structures supporting a 'linear' approach to student feedback, rising through committees and meetings within the Students' Union and the University towards senior level decision makers and cascading down within the institution.

**Diagram two** suggests a model of how student voice activity currently occurs, whereby student feedback is constant, erratic and often occurs directly between staff and students resulting in immediate capture and response, often outside of monitoring or reporting procedures. This supports the need for the union to become more dynamic in its approach to capturing the students voice and to establish systems in which it can become a 'repository' for student-staff interaction, without owning the feedback process yet still allowing for monitoring and collection to inform a watchdog approach to the student experience.

We then determined a series of pilot projects (appendix three) based on existing activity as well as designing new activities and interventions using the values of staff and student partnerships, student-led activity and broadening the number of students involved. Alongside this was a desire to change the 'narrative' behind

activity towards a more positive culture which is proactive and dynamic in its approach to enhancing the role of course committees and student representatives across the University.

## Resources

- Birmingham City Students' Union Learning Community Platform:  
[www.bcusu.com/learning](http://www.bcusu.com/learning)
- 'Student Engagement. Identity, Motivation and Community' publication on student engagement practices at BCU:  
<http://www.bcu.ac.uk/about-us/celt/student-engagement/publications>
- National Union of Students, Higher Education Zone Conference session:  
<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/40033/Accidental-collisions-asystematic-approach-to-capturing-the-student-voice/>
- List of student voice pilot projects: Please see appendix three

## Impact

This project is running concurrently with an increased focus on student engagement and collaboration between staff and students and the University and the Students' Union and so specific impacts are within a broader environment of culture change. Projects are timed to be running in the academic year 2013-14 and so direct impacts are not available at the time of writing. All activity related to this project is now embedded within the Students' Union's Student Voice department and related operational plan to sustain momentum post year one.

To date, the main impact has been within the joint University – Students' Union 'Student Representative Coordinating Group' changing its membership and terms of reference towards the vision outlined at the beginning of this case study. With the Students' Union President chairing the new 'Student Voice Group' despite sounding rather a subtle change, has refocused the approach to the organisation and delivery of many student voice related activities. As outlined in appendix three, students are becoming more prominent in the design and delivery of activity but more crucial, is the experience of students on boards of studies and course committees. This theme is now feeding into School and Faculty based discussions via Faculty staff-conference sessions and as a feature in various student engagement projects.

The relationship with Faculty management has also improved greatly. The Students' Union's Student Voice department has now met with all six Associate Deans for Student Experience and critiqued the approach to the organisation and management of student representation in their area. This has generated Faculty specific strategies in supporting student representation and has developed proposals for changes to the initial election period of student representatives (towards Easter time of Term 2) as well as mentoring programmes of second and third year representatives. Alongside this the Students' Union is now invited to staff meetings within schools and faculties looking to provide more transparency of the needs and demands placed on the Students' Union as well as developing the culture student representatives see themselves in.

Combined with the Students' Union's democracy review we are now establishing a series of student voice forums, 'Campus Action Groups' and opportunities where Students' Union and University based student voice activity is within the same room, collaborating, sharing and planning for further activity to enhance the student experience. The main focus of this approach is to maximise impact and avoid duplication of resources and approach.

A theme of staff engagement has also been developed identifying the need to educate and empower staff within this process. Aligning this project's activity with initiatives such as BCU's 'HEA What Works?' and the University wide 'Partners for Success' agenda has engineered a vehicle for BCUSU staff and elected officers to be present within discussions alongside academic staff and students looking to enhance local level student engagement and experience

Ultimately this approach is now becoming the norm. Working with students and the Students' Union is becoming part of parcel of the way in which BCU operates and in how it captures student opinion. Student

Engagement is becoming a key focus of the University and linking the way we talk about our activities so they all become part of the same conversation.

## Lessons learned

### Enablers

- A solid platform for the aim of the initiative was already agreed. This was a change programme which was part of a change of culture already in progress which helped alleviate any initial barriers to instigate action.
- Ultimately identifying the right staff and students is crucial to instigate culture change. Not just the 'already converted' are needed but also those who are able to make things happen as well as those who haven't been engaged in (in this case student engagement activity) before but wished to improve the experience for the majority.
- Team members were fully signed up to the values associated with the initiative and aware of the impact the initiative was trying to achieve. All had a 'can-do' attitude and the team as a whole was aware of what people could bring to the collective endeavour.
- Clear strategic level support was already there through both University and Students' Union strategic plans, visions and values.

### Challenges

- We could have been clearer reaffirming the exact vision of initiative. Whilst the expectations set at the outset about the focus of the project were not wrong, the team did battle with *"let's really try and pin down exactly what we want to do"* versus *"we've got some ideas so let's just run with them"*.
- The enthusiasm and eagerness to fix the most readily identifiable issue steered the team off course at the beginning. The straightforward fix of mapping the issue, creating a web resource and producing a simple educational briefing for staff and students became a red herring and distracted from the task of defining the broadest challenge to solve as opposed to the easiest to identify.
- The breadth of the project quickly mushroomed into being too large to deal with. The scope and stretch of what we wanted to 'fix' being too large and became a barrier to productive thinking and the effectiveness of the team. Insightful support for our HEA Supporter helped break the challenge down and re-focus the team to 'do' rather than 'debate'.
- Don't treat them as add-ons, even though we are talking about them as pilots, make them part of your strategic plan and integrate them into existing activity.
- The wider cascading and awareness-raising of outcomes outside of the usual channels which reach the usual suspects has been difficult. The inclusion of a communication channel as well as clear stakeholder engagement and evaluation aspect as part of the project timeline would have been useful.
- Be mindful of the 'term-one dip' in activity. From the project launch through to November the project had good momentum and progressed well however with the Christmas break and the onset of increased workloads for both staff and students, productivity and team effectiveness slowed down moving towards term two, A focused re-launch in the new year, as opposed to regular meeting, may have proved useful.
- Although team members were fully signed up and part of the vision, the delegation of key tasks and specific roles may have been clearer, especially for the student members.

## Key messages

- Get message out there as soon as possible. Start engaging, lobbying and influencing people as to what you are trying to achieve as soon as possible.
- Allocate clear roles and remits for team members and set expectations early in to the process.
- Be very clear as to your evaluation targets measures of success, although the trickiest part, it really is the most important.
- Collect evidence of impact as soon as projects go live.
- Shout about success to win over cynics and challenges to the approach.

- Identify baseline measures to inform further evaluation. We knew some of the existing structures didn't work but based on what? Where was our evidence from which to then measure the impact of the new initiatives?
- 'Piggyback' existing activity that supports your goal and can offer vehicles for the achievement of complementary activity. For example we aligned activity against 'Partners for Success' activity looking at student retention and wider sector knowledge such as the HEA's What Works? report and the work of the National Union of Students.
- Identify your reporting process; where is your activity going to go to generate the necessary approval and support. Can your initiative be represented in some way?

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Diagram One

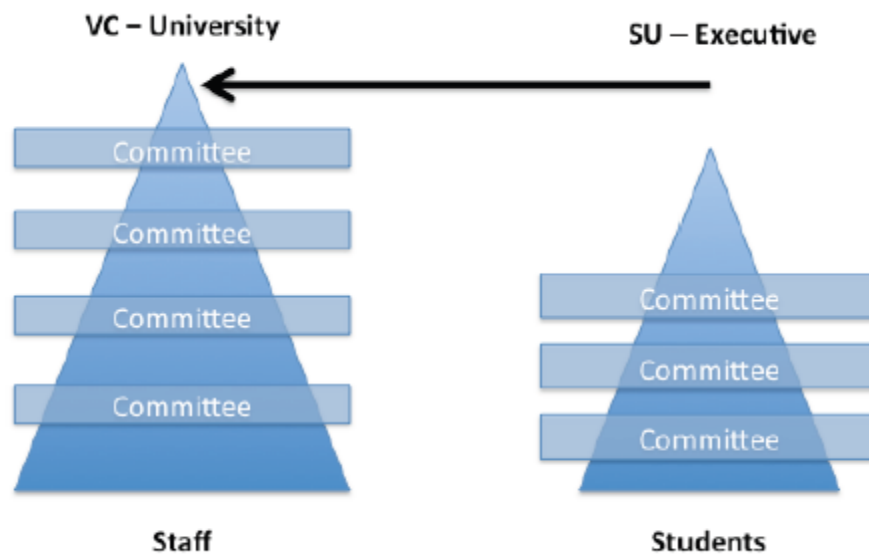
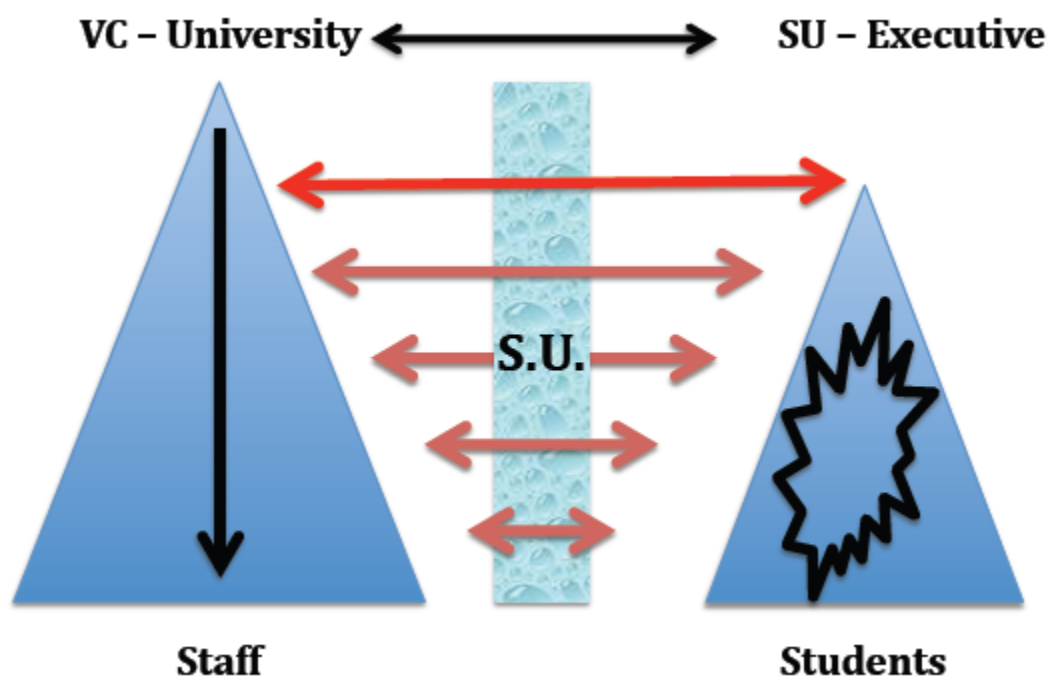


Diagram Two



## Student Academic Development Research Associates Scheme (SADRAS)

Kingston University

### Introduction

#### Aims

This scheme aims to encourage staff and students to undertake educational and pedagogic research with the purpose of improving the academic experience of students at the university.

This work will encourage collaboration between staff and students, enabling students to both provide a perspective on how the student experience might be improved but also to undertake paid research in an academic environment.

The scheme is a joint venture between the university's Academic Development Centre and the Student Union. The Students' Union believes that by engaging students and staff together in research, a better educational experience can be provided to the student body.

This scheme is designed to develop a culture of collaboration between students and staff at a grass roots level, giving individual students and staff an opportunity to make a positive change to the learning experience at Kingston.

The design of the scheme owes much to the Student Academic Partners project at Birmingham City University but it is envisaged that this scheme will have a particular focus of its own, emanating as it does from a long tradition at Kingston of staff student partnership working.

#### Nature and scope

Both staff and students will be invited to initiate and consider particular issues which they would like to be the subject of the research. These ideas may have arisen from Staff Student Consultative Committees or other formal student consultations but may also be provoked by individual thoughts, ideas and experiences. Projects will be in line with the university's new strategic plan: "Led by Learning", and will aim to enhance the student experience by active student engagement and impact positively on progression, retention and attainment. Successful proposals will clearly show how the student will be an active partner in the project and preference will be given to those proposals that have been developed collaboratively.

27 projects are being funded in Year 1

How can space be improved to encourage collaboration between disciplines?

Measuring student sustainability literacy;

Evaluating E-books as a learning tool;

Collaboration across the 1992 divide: the PG research student experience;

An investigation into the provision of course feedback and how it can be enhanced to suit students' needs using personal tutors.

#### Align with mission and strategic plan

A new strategic plan "Led by Learning" has just been approved by the university Governors and this scheme has been explicitly designed to be informed by and contribute to the implementation of this plan.

The university is also implementing a new Academic Framework which has also been informed by "Led by Learning". This framework encompasses a number of Curriculum Design Framework Principles which all UG and PG programmes will be required to reflect. Consequently, all validation panels will ask questions including:

“Are there opportunities for students to engage with the development of aspects of their course as part of a learning community?”

The university has a tradition of widening participation and has a strong access record. However we are concerned about the attainment gap between our BME and white students and believe this scheme may provide student insights into a number of pertinent issues.

### [How it will enhance quality of student experience](#)

Our main aim is that the projects themselves will directly impact positively on the student experience. We also expect the student partners involved to benefit from their engagement but we will look to validate this claim. We will also systematically disseminate the findings from these projects and encourage their implementation across the university and its partners.

### **Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance**

The project aims to enhance:

- The students' experience of undertaking educational research
- Staff and student relationships through collaborative working
- Sharing knowledge and experiences of staff and students
- The provision of student perspectives to enhancements in learning and teaching
- Improved self-confidence in students
- A greater sense of belonging to the institution by the student

### **Approaches and activities developed**

#### [Panel](#)

A Steering group was convened at the start of the project. It consisted of staff from the Academic Development Centre and student representatives from the Student Union. The remit of the group is to:

- Be responsible for the monitoring, evaluation and development of the scheme;
- Make decisions regarding the launch of the scheme;
- Attend and support the selection panel;
- Attend and contribute to the scheme induction event;
- Act as mentors for scheme participants;
- Attend and participate in the year 1 dissemination event.

#### [Launch](#)

The scheme was launched at the start of the academic year, a week after Induction. The Academic Development Centre and the Student's Union had websites to publicise the scheme and posted announcements on relevant intranet sites and to key staff/students. The deadline for proposals was tight which may have prevented some people from applying but this was due to the fact that approval for the scheme was granted at the start of the summer vacation so nothing could realistically be done until September. Publicity will commence much earlier for year 2 to maximise applications.

#### [Decisions panel](#)

A panel was convened to sift through the applications and decide which would be funded. Staff and students worked to a number of criteria to determine successful applicants.



## Induction

A successful induction event was held for all scheme participants. This was extremely well received and almost all 110 staff and students were in attendance.

## Workshops

A number of workshops were provided for students participating in SADRAS projects. These were based on the project timeline and focussed on: Getting started, Time Management, Collecting feedback, and Poster preparation.

## Dissemination event

A dissemination event is due to be held on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> April. It will take form of poster presentations by all the projects. Additionally, further dissemination of the projects is being planned within the university in June and July to coincide with the launch of the 2013/14 projects.

## **Resources**

Kingston University Student Union SADRAS website click [here](#)

## **Impact**

An independent evaluation has been put in place from the beginning of the project. A draft interim report is attached, the evaluation framework aimed to:

- Collect and analyse the perceptions and experiences of both students and staff in project teams, before, during and on its completion.
- Identify any impact the scheme has on the development of a community of learning and a culture of student / staff collaboration.
- Determine whether the projects impacted on the student experience (satisfaction, progression and retention)

We have information and insights as to: the level of previous educational research experience of staff and students; how staff and students became aware of SADRAS; the perceived level of support; the reasons cited by staff and students for engaging in SADRAS; the self-reported research and generic knowledge and skills gained by staff and students through working on a SADRAS project and the perceived benefits for staff and student partners. The final category included:

- Facilitating change / improvement
- Getting the student voice heard
- Improving staff/student relationships
- Sharing experience and knowledge
- Evidence informed teaching

A final evaluation will be produced in June and will draw further evidence from:

- Students
  - Questionnaire
  - Focus groups
- Staff
  - Questionnaire
  - Focus groups or interviews
- Steering Group
  - Focus group or interviews



## Lessons learned

A great deal has been learned about the process of managing the project and the support provided for staff and students. The following summarise the main issues:

- More explicit links to the university's Revised academic framework (RAF) and the university's Strategic plan Led by Learning
- Less focus on skills and more on community and partnership
- More support for project over application to Ethics committees and guidance for students on undertaking focus groups
- Steering group to take greater ownership for the managing of the project
- Project manager to have ultimate responsibility for the project and report to the steering group
- More systematic selection process for applications
- Use of Year one projects to enhance awareness of SADRAS
- More clarification around student and staff partner roles / responsibilities
- Application form to include:
  - Agreement for both students and staff partners to attend workshops and dissemination events
  - Raising awareness about ethics? block book at session with Faculty Ethics Committees (we do this in health for the SW post grad students for example)
- Further consideration of how student payment is managed (issues with tax / burdensome to coordinate)

## Next steps

Funds have been allocated (through the university's Access Agreement) to support SADRAS in 2013/14 and 2014/15. The Steering Group will be planning the launch of the 2013/14 round which will occur three months earlier than in the first year. The launch and the subsequent application process, selection and support will be further informed by the final evaluation report in June 2013.

## Key messages

- The relationship between the university Academic Development Centre and the Student Union worked very well but required commitment on both sides and all decisions to be taken by mutual agreement.
- We were extremely fortunate to have secured the support of Professor Stuart Brand from Birmingham City University who provided invaluable insight and practical advice.
- We learned a great deal about the appropriate support to give the projects in terms of addressing the ethical aspects of their research.

It was vital to have a dedicated project manager and external evaluator.

## **Introduction**

Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) has an existing track record of engaging students in shaping their academic and wider University experience; however, this is not necessarily consistent across all Faculties and disciplines. The Initiative allowed us the opportunity to embed awareness and involvement in student engagement throughout the Institution.

From the outset, the Initiative was viewed as being best delivered as a partnership between LJMU and Liverpool Students' Union (LiverpoolSU) to ensure that it did not appear 'top down' to students and to enhance their engagement and generate interest. This partnership would also importantly allow joint branding and joint promotion, as it was seen to be important that the Initiative used the strengths of both organisations to convey key messages to different stakeholders.

Being aware that many of our students are local commuters and mature, we were also keen to explore how we might better embed their University experience with their existing and continuing lives in the City; hence deciding to extend the Initiative to also cover student engagement in the community.

## **Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance**

Our overall objectives were to involve students as partners in all aspects of development and improvement of their learning experience and also link their learning experience with community activity. We sought a step change in this thinking across LJMU, rather than it being seen by some as ancillary to everyday activities.

## **Approaches and activities developed**

A steering committee was established, chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education, with members from LiverpoolSU, a range of Faculties and professional services departments. This committee was responsible for agreeing the parameters of the Initiative, appointing the bid selection panel, acting as critical friend for the staff and Officers assigned to the implementation group and advising on approaches to generating interest from different areas of the University.

The implementation group consisted of the Director of the Academic Enhancement Unit; a Faculty Learning and Development Manager; the President and the Vice-President Activities of LiverpoolSU and the Director of Member Support and Development of LiverpoolSU. A key aim was to ensure that activities would help to develop and implement partnership as stated in the University's Strategic Plan, the related Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy strand: 'Establishing and Enhancing the Student Partnership with particular reference to employability and entrepreneurship', and Liverpool SU's priorities. The group agreed to focus initially on awareness-raising and partnership projects. It developed the criteria for bids, bid guidance and application forms, and planned activities to brief particular staff groups on the opportunity. A brief was given to the design firm used by Liverpool SU to develop distinct branding for the Initiative and support provided by LJMU Corporate Communications to launch website content and other publicity.

As a precursor to the full launch, our annual Student Voice Week in November was used to further promote the concept of student engagement as being an expectation at LJMU, with course leaders and course reps being asked to work together to undertake activities with students to feedback and review their courses. A presentation and a workshop were held with the University's Strategic Development Forum to encourage interest in the Initiative.

Key points in criteria for bids to be accepted for projects were:

- Evidence of the bid having been initiated by students;
- Approach to delivery of the project is student led;
- Students involved will develop skills which enhance their ability to be increasingly active in University or community development;
- There will be a tangible impact for the area in which the project focusses;
- There will be a positive impact on the experience of students, beyond those who are involved in the project;
- The change resulting from the project will be sustained after its conclusion;
- Students' partners can be any academic or infrastructure University staff or voluntary and community sector organisations;
- Projects which do not seek financial support may still be considered for acceptance and subsequent promotion through the Change Liverpool Initiative;
- Projects which do seek financial support to meet their objectives may apply for up to a maximum of £1,000.

In line with Liverpool SU's ethos and previous campaigns around 'Pound in Your Pocket' it was made clear in bid guidance that funding could, and often should, be considered to cover payment to student partners for their work on their project; with at least Living Wage level being paid.

It was seen as important not to deter potential applicants who may have valid but insufficiently shaped ideas and so a short bid proposal form was produced to allow students to put forward an idea. One of the Implementation group would then be allocated to the individual to discuss their idea and provide guidance on how it might be further developed.

On full launch of the Initiative, website content was backed up with Facebook and Twitter promotion by Liverpool SU and news items from LJMU Corporate Communications.

## Resources

[The branded website content also gives access to bid documentation and guidance and can be found here](#)

## Impact

The Initiative is still at an early stage of development and this was partly anticipated given the very wide remit chosen at the outset.

The impact on the culture of the University is already starting to be felt, in that engagement-related conversations have taken place at senior and other levels. These have been partly prompted by project funding bids, including those where resubmission has been advised, which have formed part of an ongoing dialogue that helps to embed the Initiative. A significant project accepted for support involves a group of students being provided with mentoring from the LiverpoolSU Academic Experience Manager to redesign the Course Rep system within LJMU. It is anticipated that this group will report in May 2013 and steps will then begin to roll out a new system for September 2013. We expect this bid to help to inform institutional change and some work is already taking place at faculty and programme level to develop this.

A number of initial bid proposals have also been received. One has been accepted and two have been reviewed and feedback given on how they might better fit with the objectives of the Initiative. Guidance has been given on a proposed project for students to review and remodel a new Law and Social Media module which is to be undertaken for the first time. A student volunteering with a community centre in a deprived area of the City has sought guidance on linking up with students with film making experience to produce a promotional video for the centre.

## **Lessons learned**

Certainly the key lesson learnt during this Initiative is that it can take longer to achieve a large scale step change than the duration of the HEA Programme and that whilst we have now laid firm foundations for the Initiative to grow, it may be the start of the new academic year before we see a jump in the number of bids received. We are keen to continue the Initiative and have concluded that there will be benefits to it being viewed as ongoing 'business as usual' and part of the fabric of LJMU, rather than a short-term offer that comes and then goes.

## **Next steps**

It is intended that the Initiative continues into and through the next academic year and further promotion will accompany this.

In particular, further work will be done to promote the opportunity to students who volunteer in the community as it is felt that there is huge potential here to link up organisations with skills other students can offer; increase students' engagement with LJMU through enhancing its significance and contribution to other interests in their lives and contributing to our commitment to being a civic University.

Further work will also be carried out to develop increased partnership work in relation to quality processes and enhancement and to engage more staff with the Initiative with a view to embedding it and ensuring it can be sustained.

## **Key messages**

- It can take more than one academic year to develop a successful rolling programme of activities around student engagement across one large and diverse institution;
- Timing for launching a large initiative is crucial and if the short window between around October and February is not hit then this will have implications on students and University staff having time to devote to developing proposals and participating within an academic year.
- The model of partnership working between University and Students' Union provides great benefits in terms of bringing complementary perspectives and catering for the differing language needed to convey key messages to different stakeholders.

## Design your own course? A new role for students in programme development and curriculum design

Manchester Metropolitan University

### Introduction

#### Aim

To develop student/staff partnerships in curriculum design with particular focus on student participation in curriculum development and review.

#### Objectives

- To examine the ways in which students can contribute to curriculum design and development
- To specify the roles which student representatives can play in developing course specifications
- To encourage course representatives to act as ambassadors for innovation in the curriculum to both staff and students.

MMU staff and students have worked together very productively particularly in the last few years so that there are many areas of good practice: a student representatives conference was organised by the university in 2012 and 2013; a very successful staff awards scheme is in its fourth year of operation; students now have places on standing panels for programme review and approval processes; the student voice is heard in many ways in addition to routine module and course evaluations, such as via termly student union reports which are regularly received by all staff.

However, student voice in curriculum design itself remains an under-developed area. Our Students' Union would like us to move from a model of 'acquisition' to one of 'participation' (Streeter and Wise 2009). There are many elements to this approach, but one could be that course reps could take some responsibility for parts of the curriculum development process. We have already started moving along these lines - for instance, students are systematically represented on all course approval and review panels – but we recognise that we need to work towards more substantive cultural change to achieve real partnership in this area.

Confident student participation in meaningful dialogue around curriculum design is an objective that articulates well with one of the four cornerstones of MMU's Strategic Framework for Learning Teaching and Assessment:

*Engaging with, and learning from, our learners – this provides the commitment that: 'We will develop our engagement with learners and their representatives to ensure effective partnership in providing the best conditions for student progression and success'*

[\(Manchester Metropolitan University 2010\)](#)

### **Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance**

The initiative sought to develop the concept of partnership in curriculum development. It was hoped that this would encourage students to become more engaged with the ways in which they were taught and to give them useful transferable skills in communication, negotiation and problem-solving, as well as enhancing the courses for future students.

## Approaches and activities developed

The project team aimed to pilot a curriculum enhancement partnership with a large programme in the Business School. The plan was:

1. Identify area for change
2. Help students to propose ways to achieve the change
3. Help students to present their proposals to staff
4. Review implementation of the change

At the beginning of the project, meetings were held separately with members of staff involved with the selected programme, as well as with course reps who had expressed an interest. The staff members suggested that the spring term staff-student liaison committee would be a good opportunity for course reps to make some kind of presentation to staff.

At the beginning of the autumn term 2012, all registered course reps were contacted to explain about the project, and a further meeting was held, at which course reps worked with the SaP team to develop an approach for addressing a specific issue identified by course reps: lectures which could occasionally be a little dull.

The course reps indicated that they might be uncomfortable with giving a formal presentation to their tutors, and that pressures on their time would make preparation difficult. We therefore suggested that they could run a low key staff development activity about 'Livening Up Lectures' which could be carried out in a staff-student liaison committee meeting. They suggested a time and date in January to practise the activity in advance of the staff-student liaison committee in February, and the SaP project team developed some simple resources which the course reps could use in small groups. A further invitation to participate and a reminder about the January meeting were sent out to all course reps by the Students' Union.

The agenda of the staff-student liaison committee went out with the item 'Presentation from the Year 2 students' listed. We emailed all of the course representatives to clarify that this wasn't an accurate description, and that it was a collaborative activity that was planned, as we had previously discussed with those who had attended meetings.

At the staff-student liaison committee meeting, the SaP team explained the project to the meeting, and participants carried out the activity. The minutes of the meeting 'encourage programme teams to find ways of interacting with students and their representatives to enhance the learning experience.' – which is something for us to follow up at subsequent meetings.

The staff-student liaison meeting was much more formal than we had anticipated. However, the experience was useful, as it gave us some clear ideas about the need to propose slight changes to some of our processes for working with students. In particular, we have identified the need to recognise and support less formal approaches for involving students. The SaP team was able to feed this experience into the institutional student voice report which was completed in March 2013, and to make some subtle changes to official documentation, listed below, which we hope will facilitate a slightly different approach to partnership.

Following these activities, we held a development day with our project supporter, Derfel Owen, which helped us to review our approaches and develop a plan.

## Resources

- 'Livening up your lectures' resources produced for students to use with staff
- Web page for staff, produced by the SU

## Impact

Whilst the project did not achieve all of its intended outcomes in the specific programme which was selected for a pilot study, it has had a noticeable impact on the planning for the future. We recognise the need to work with staff and students to change cultures before trying to make the ambitious leap from consultation to full partnership.

- Contribution to the Student Voice review which sets out plans for future partnership (February 2013 and ongoing)
- Presentation to Governors about the project and future plans for partnership (April 2013)
- Embedding a commitment to student partnership, rather than simply consultation, into the new Institutional Code of Practice for Teaching and Learning, and in new Programme Specification documents which will be in use for all programmes being approved or reviewed from September 2013
- Inclusion of curriculum development training for Course Reps in the MMU Futures programme, which gives students an opportunity to gain 'points' for extra-curricular activities (September 2013)
- Inclusion of student partnership training for Programme Leaders in regular staff development activity (April 2013 and ongoing)
- Resources for staff on the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching website (May 2013)
- Resources for course reps on the MMUSU Course rep training area (September 2013)

## Lessons learned

Our principal finding has been that our current quality assurance systems tend to entrench familiar roles and conversations; some slight changes may be needed to enable staff and students to feel confident in making changes.

We needed, and still need, to talk a lot about partnership and discuss how it differs from the familiar pattern of student complaint-staff response-student thanks. We still need to move away from a more formal language of responsibility, obligation and rights to talk more about partnership, trust, and sharing expertise. The complex nature of assessment in Higher Education, with the same staff developing, delivering and assessing courses, can lead to a perceived power differential which may inhibit some students from contributing effectively to course development. Staff may feel anxious about potentially opening themselves up to criticism, or even to spurious suggestions for change. Staff and students seem to need 'permission' within university structures to have open conversations about curriculum development.

## Next steps

We still need to develop more effective ways to make the most of students' expertise in being learners to enhance the curriculum.

Students: we need to	Staff: we need to	University structures need to	Leadership needs to
Understand reticence and boundaries Develop confidence Give permission to contribute Trust judgements Recognise contributions	Understand reticence and boundaries  Develop confidence  Recognise contributions	Encourage and enable partnership  Provide training and support	Live the rhetoric

We can develop students' confidence and provide them with recognition through the MMU Futures scheme, which gives 'points' for participation. We have devised a scheme which offers bronze points for attendance at training sessions on curriculum development, silver for recordable engagement with curriculum development, and gold for successful achievement of change in partnership with academic staff.

For staff, we have already begun to include consideration of partnership in academic staff development activity, both accredited and non-accredited. The proposals were presented at an awayday for Governors and members of Academic Board in April 2013. Changes to policies and documentation have been made as a result of the project, with the intention of making subtle changes to culture:

1. The new Institutional Code of Practice on Learning and Teaching has as one of its aims: "to create a culture of partnership, promoting situations where the student voice is fully integrated into learning and teaching"
2. New programme specification documentation, requires programme teams to explain how the programme team works with students and uses information about students to enhance and enrich the programme (March 2013).

In 2013/14, we plan to offer a mentoring scheme to programme teams (including course representatives). Teams will be able to bid to participate in the scheme, and will be partnered with SU/CELT staff who will help them to take through a small, student-led enhancement to the curriculum. These changes will be written up as case studies in our in-house peer-reviewed journal, Learning and Teaching in Action, and will be highlighted at the annual Students' Union awards ceremony, as well as at the annual CELT conference on learning and teaching. These case studies will be used to encourage other courses and departments to get involved in new approaches to working together.

In the medium term, we would like to look at other ways to develop the partnership culture, such as the election of one student representative per course to co-chair programme committee meetings and to be responsible for actions following meetings.

Longer term, we hope to embed a more open and participatory culture of curriculum development in our continuous improvement processes.

## **Key messages**

There is a need to be clear about definitions and expectations – 'partnership' can be a slippery concept.

Both staff and students seem to need 'permission' to step outside familiar roles to become partners in curriculum enhancement; there is a need for both partners to develop confidence.

Small changes to regulatory documentation can help to support a developing culture of partnership

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## **Introduction**

In July 2011, Julie Blackwell-Young was awarded the Newman University Fellowship in Academic Practice to develop a research initiative to increase student engagement. This was conducted through a psychology and counselling based curriculum enhancement initiative in which eight undergraduate students worked with Julie to develop a research methods student resource page on moodle (Newman's virtual learning environment), following a co-producers and partnership model. The core purpose of this resource was that resources were created *BY* students *FOR* students. Early evaluation of this initiative indicated that the creative freedom increased student confidence in their abilities to inform the curriculum.

Participation within the HEA Students as Partners programme enabled Julie Blackwell-Young and psychology students Alexandra Kirby and Laura Robinson to build on the experiences gained within their subject area to explore whether such an initiative could be applied to another subject area within the institution. Julie Blackwell-Young approached Claire Monk to discuss applying the model within research methods modules under the Working with Children, Young People and Families (WCYPF) programme. Two students were identified (Roz Ward and Hannah Baker) to lead the initiative within WCYPF, subsequent to being mentored by Alexandra Kirby and Laura Robinson. The aims of the initiative were:

- To facilitate the creation of a Research Methods Resource on moodle for WCYPF to enhance student learning and understanding
- To increase student engagement, both for those participating in the initiative but also for those accessing the resource
- To enhance the transferable skills of the student teams through the experience of taking part in the initiative and mentoring other students.

The initiative is aligned with a strategic theme within Newman's strategic plan: building a formative student experience. It is also in line with a key strategic objective of Newman's Learning and Teaching Strategy: 'students and employers play an active role in developing and improvement of curriculum content, approaches to learning and modes of assessment and feedback'.

## **Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance**

In relation to students, the initiative aimed to involve students as partners within a community of practice (Wenger et al, 2002). Students involved with creating learning resources potentially enhanced their subject understanding, gained transferable skills, and gained ownership of their learning experience, and had the opportunity to enhance the students learning experience of their peers. The initiative aimed to break down (hierarchical) barriers between academic staff and students, developing a two-way learning and teaching dialogue between staff and students in relation to curriculum development and enhancement.

## **Approaches and activities developed**

The two-day residential in Leeds gave the students the time, space and opportunity to collaborate and become acquainted. The WCYPF students benefitted from the experience of the psychology students in order to formulate a strategy for action in the following 6 months, and the psychology students worked out how to mentor and work with the WCYPF students in order to further drive forward the initiative.

The first step for both WCYPF and Psychology students was to undertake some initial quantitative research in order to understand fellow students needs in relation to the research module (Psychology students also evaluated the previous year in order to improve the resources as well as build up further resources). WCYPF students contacted the e-learning team to arrange for moodle training for themselves. In turn they could then train fellow students who had (in the research phase) identified a willingness to assist in the initiative.

The moodle page was established and the link circulated to students. Students leading on the initiative also developed the idea to create bookmarks detailing the moodle page website so students always had the web address to hand.

## Resources



The students set up moodle pages to which they could upload their various research resources.

- [Psychology student research resources](#)
- [WCYPF Student Research Resources \(this is still very much under development\)](#)



In addition to using moodle, the students created Facebook pages (again, these are still very much in developmental stages)

- [Page for WCYPF research methods](#)
- [Page for psychology and counselling research methods](#)



Plus, a [Twitter feed](#)

## Impact

Within Psychology, it has been noted that there has been some use of the moodle resource in the last couple of weeks (March 2013) and the resources most accessed were the glossary and decision tree. Currently Twitter has 3 followers, but the Facebook pages have no “like” hits at the moment. This will be due to the fact that the students have not been able to create any updates at the moment because of their own workloads.

Obvious impact on the students leading the initiative is the moodle training, working across the institution with other students in another subject area, developing the ability to create learning materials accessible to fellow students, students being able to make informed decisions about the curriculum and offering ideas for improvement.

Unintended impact can be linked to academic staff. Some colleagues who may have initially ignored the idea of students developing resources, or students being “partners” in curriculum development and enhancement are now being swayed in favour of developing more student partnerships.

## Lessons learned

There have been many lessons that have been learned throughout the process of the initiative:

- More consideration needed to be given at the start of the initiative to what, in this context, constituted a *student “partnership”* and how much the initiative should be “student driven” or student-lead. On the one hand, the nature of the initiative required very much a student leadership approach because the purpose was that students created and designed resources for fellow students based on their own understanding and interpretation of content taught by tutors. We need to break down the tutor-student barriers both the parallel wall but also breakthrough the hierarchical ceiling that sometimes exists within student

partnerships. Therefore how much realistically can students fully lead such initiatives? What is the distribution of tutor-student control? What should both parties be able to expect within the student partnership?

- *Student engagement and independent learning:* Within an initiative such as this it is usually the motivated, able confident students who are willing to get involved and openly share their work. Both the WCYPF and psychology students felt that there are a number of students who are willing to be spoon-fed and do not develop the attributes of an “independent learner”, thus such a resource (led by the able students) only fosters the spoon-feeding nature of students. Similarly the students acknowledged that the less confident students are much less likely to willingly share their resources or contribute to resources. In addition, students leading the initiative (particularly in WCYPF) received offers of assistance and participation from a number of their peers at the start of the academic year but this soon fell short when final year workload increased and deadlines loomed. Therefore difficulties remain around how to a) make the initiative more engaging of all students and b) engaging students who do not naturally engage in the learning and participation process. Some consideration could be given to anonymising material, requiring students to work in groups to raise confidence or to link the creation of resources to formative assessment in first year with a view that students may feel more confident to contribute resources in second and third years.
- The *module* in question may not necessarily work in all subject areas: the initiative was originally established for psychology and counselling students to create research resources to supplement the tutor’s teaching resources. As the initiative progressed with WCYPF, the students found it quite difficult to apply the model used by the psychology students to their own subject area. To some extent, it was felt that generating research materials would simply be recreating materials already given. However, it was felt that the initiative might instead be better applied to the work placement module within WCYPF. Placement is a requirement (for single honours students) in each year group. Similarly the Psychology students were also beginning to consider further modules within their programme to which the initiative could be applied and likewise considered the work experience module, and also the cognitive psychology module. In short, while the initiative did not necessarily work for research methods in WCYPF, the idea could certainly be applied to other modules and programmes need to carefully consider which aspect of their curriculum of programme might be enhanced.
- The *timing* of the initiative: Currently third year full time students are leading the initiative within Psychology and WCYPF. At the time of writing this case study (February 2013), the initiative within both subject areas has temporarily been suspended due to student work load (dissertations, work placement, exams etc). Therefore consideration needs to be given to whether such initiatives are feasible within semester-time. Perhaps institutions need to consider offering paid internships in the summer period. It is now being explored within the institution if such initiatives can be paid for through the Access Agreement, at the time of writing discussions on this matter are still being held.
- Another point in relation to timing, relates to time management and the time taken to create materials. Students acknowledge that running initiatives and creating materials and resources takes a much longer time than they had originally anticipated.

## Next steps

In the *short term*, information is being sought on the Access Agreement and how this might enable academic staff to create summer internships to enable students to further develop the initiative in the summer period.

In the *medium term*, within WCYPF the two students leading the initiative will meet with the WCYPF work placement module leader to discuss developing the initiative in line with the placement modules. Newman’s Placement tutor for all programmes is also interested in being party to this discussion.

Students need to consider when and how they will hand over the initiative to fellow students to continue the work after current students graduate. A consideration needs to be given to “branding” the initiative so that it

a) stands out clearly from standard module content given by tutors b) stands out as “students as partners” and c) can be marketed and established across the institution as an initiative. Findings from the current initiative need to be developed within Newman and across the wider academic field.

In the *long term*, the initiative needs to be driven forward across other subject areas within Newman, not only to academic staff but also to the student body with the aim that eventually students will drive the initiative forward and begin to apply it to modules without the need for tutors driving from *within* modules.

### **Key messages**

While there have been issues along the way preventing the students from progressing the initiative as much as they had anticipated, the learning experience for the students and staff involved has generally been a positive one. Enabling students to contribute towards the teaching and learning input of their programme instils confidence, a sense of ownership, and develops the “independent learner”. For staff, the initiative has instilled a stronger notion that students can be partners, although – for any ‘student as partners’ initiative - the form that the “partnership” takes needs careful consideration from the outset, boundaries and parameters for staff-student leadership and involvement needs careful consideration. On the whole, staff-student partnership initiatives can play a part in enabling programmes to break down hierarchical divisions within academia to encourage students to take greater ownership of their learning experience.

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## Introduction

Course Design Consultancy is a change initiative in Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) where students have been recruited to be Course Design Consultants (CDCs). The significance of the Course Design Consultancy within the institution is that there is a model and a structure in place for students to engage 'early on' in the course and design approval process which has never existed before. The role of students as CDCs is to work alongside course leaders and course planning teams in the (re)design of their courses for approval. More importantly, the role of the CDCs includes working alongside students on a respective course, specifically engaging them in what we have termed a 'solutions-based' workshop where students conjure ideas and recommendations for improving their course. The output is a CDC Report that summarises student ideas and recommendations taken from workshop for improving the course. This short report is written-up by CDCs with dissemination to course leader, course planning team and students on the course.

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) sector-wide *Students as Partners* (S-a-P) initiative has given both students and staff at SHU the opportunity to think creatively about how the institution engages students in its course design and approval process. As stipulated within the institution's Academic Quality Framework, course design teams have to evidence how students have appropriately contributed to the design process, contributing to the design of new and existing courses. The design principles of the Academic Quality Framework calls for students to be active partners in enhancing the curriculum with time dedicated to dialogue, collaborative reflection and sharing experiences. While this process calls for student involvement, it demands innovative action where students are empowered to contribute. This is, of course, is congruent with the steps the University needs to take to meet the expectations outlined in Chapter B5 (Student Engagement) of Part B of the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Currently, members of course design teams seeking approval for a new or existing course have to respond to questions raised within the institution's internal course design and approval online system. In the latter, there is a section of questions related to student engagement that course design teams have to respond to:

*How were students actively engaged/involved in the design process? Give details of how students were involved (e.g. surveys, feedback questionnaire, focus group meetings, workshops, formal consultations). How many students participated in the design process? How have students' views been addressed by the programme/curriculum design?*

The SHU S-a-P change team which included students (Holly Ormrod-Stebbing, Emma Kirby, and Elizabeth Webster), student union staff (Jessica Baily) and officers (Scott Storey/Jessica Goldstone), and university staff (Samantha Giove, Laraine Cookson and Manny Madriaga) sought an intervention that ensures the active involvement of students in the course design process that moves beyond the minimum of only citing questionnaire data and module evaluation forms as evidence of student engagement in the design process. It is from this need of enhancing student engagement in course design that SHU's S-a-P change team conjured and piloted the Course Design Consultancy this year.

## Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

The initiative aimed to create an opportunity where students can become active agents, partnering with staff in the course design and approval process. As indicated above, the SHU S-a-P change team wanted to move beyond the minimum of the student voice that can be paralleled to relying on student responses to a survey and/or module evaluation questionnaires. The team also sought an intervention to enhance student engagement in the course design and approval process which was not ad-hoc and/or 'too late'. For instance, members of the change team who sit on faculty course approval committees have observed situations where decisions for course approval have been contingent on course planners to engage students in the design. For a course planning team, this usually translates into incorporating feedback from an ad-hoc meeting with students

into course approval documentation. This is 'too late' for student ideas to be considered in the design of a course.

Thus, the change team sought an intervention where student input, concerns, considerations and ideas to improve course experience were captured 'early on' in the course approval process. This would then offer course planners a firmer foundation of student voice in the design of their course. Moreover, it would provide an opportunity for course planners to partner, collaborate and receive support from students who hold significant roles and responsibilities as managers and consultants in the Course Design Consultancy.

### **Approaches and activities developed**

There were critical factors in designing an intervention to engage students in our institution's course design and approval process. One of the factors was remuneration for student engagement. Other institutions remunerate students for similar purposes. However, the SHU change team was mixed about this, particularly in terms of scalability, as remuneration of students to participate in this work could be resource heavy if initiative was rolled out at a wider scale. Another critical success factor was the need to create a repository of knowledge, such as a bank of student reflections, case studies, and feedback from course leaders and faculty approval panels,

to benefit future course design consultants, making the project sustainable for future years. This stemmed from the fact that students who participate in this initiative will eventually leave and graduate from our University. Lastly, another critical success factor was having a line manager and experts in place to support and train students to be confident and assured 'partners' working alongside course leaders and course planning teams.

In addressing these critical success factors, the change team explored the possibilities of collaborating with Venture Matrix™. The latter is an institutional scheme that works across academic departments allowing opportunities for students to develop their employability and enterprise skills through real life work-related projects that are accredited as part of their degree. Venture Matrix™ also offered weekly line management in the form of a project officer who is on student placement. This will ensure that students are trained and supported in carrying out work on the initiative. This reassured the SHU change team that the initiative can be sustainable beyond this year and reliable with everyday line management. A consideration of the roll-out of this scheme next year is to expand these line management duties of CDCs to all placement students within the Student and Learning Services Directorate. The current number of placement students is eight. This will ensure that placement students leave their placements with experience of line management responsibilities.

Venture Matrix™ was central to our initiative. Two 2nd-year students were recruited by Venture Matrix™ to become CDCs. However, only having two CDCs was risky, particularly when the project aim was to pilot intervention on two courses. Sheffield Business School aided in the recruitment of two more CDCs who already volunteer their time as faculty student executive representatives. All four CDCs were line managed by the student placement project officer in Venture Matrix™.

All CDCs received training in role by staff in quality enhancement portfolio and gained insight from the SHU change team, specifically on conducting evaluative work and knowledge of the institution's course design and approval process. These students met up with course leaders and course planning teams who were interested in engaging with the initiative and these students as CDCs shared what they can offer. When offer was taken up, CDCs contacted student course representatives and students on the course to participate in 'solution-based' workshops to develop ideas for course improvement and assess feasibility for improving the course. An output of workshop was a CDC Report which included recommendations based on student ideas taken from workshops. This report was handed over to course leader, course planning teams, student course representatives and students on the course. The report also provided evidence of student engagement in course submission documents for faculty course approval committees.

So, essentially, CDCs:



- are students who have flexible roles. But, mainly, they organise and lead solutions-based workshops with students to collect 'student' recommendations and solutions to benefit their course leader and course planning teams at the early stages of a course design approval process;
- are trained by staff in quality enhancement portfolio to make them aware of institution's course design and approval process and how to lead and manage a 'solutions-based' workshop with students;
- meet up with course leaders and course planning teams who are interested in taking part in initiative who have just begun their (re)approval process. It is at this meeting where CDCs will share what they can offer to course teams;
- organise and run 'solutions-based' workshops with students on course;
- write a short report on the findings taken from workshops for the course leader and course planning team to inform them in their course design process, which can be attached as an appendix to course submission document for (re)approval;
- operate independently and are not usually students on similar or related courses they do consultancy work for. This would negate possible outcomes being biased.
- report to line manager who is a student placement conducting work on behalf of SHU.
- feedback and contribute to CDC steering group (which has primarily been composed of members of the student and staff partnership change team that conjured the idea of the Course Design Consultancy.)

## Resources

For more information about the Course Design Consultancy initiative that was piloted, [we kept a blog](#) to upload information for students and course leaders within institution. This resource includes student CDC role specifications and what it entails. It will be regularly updated.

[The Course Design Consultancy blog links to Venture Matrix™](#) This website explains how this work-based learning scheme makes impact within and beyond the institution.

The work of [Hallam Union](#) is also linked, particularly the co-curricular activity of the [Hallam Award](#).

This work was done to enhance student engagement in the course design and approval process which is an aspect of the University's [Academic Quality Framework](#).

## Impact

We sought to make impact within the institution. An intended outcome was to have something tangible such as representative case studies of our intervention that can be shared throughout the institution. Our pilot intended to commit to only two courses which required (re)approval in two of the four faculties. In the end, CDCs were involved in the design of four courses. This was largely due to other courses within the same department being up for approval at the same time, and staff keen on being a part of the change initiative and evidencing student engagement in their course design.

The success of getting this initiative off the ground, of course, requires communication. This has come in the form of CDCs being able to share their experiences at a faculty-wide conference on student engagement for learning within the institution last month. For all CDCs involved, this was the first time they actually presented at an academic conference to an academic audience. They were able to share what they have gained from the project such as research and evaluation experience, experience in leading workshops and experience in report writing. More opportunities for students to share their experiences will come as the change team seeks to mainstream this student consultancy throughout the institution next year. We want to be able to recruit more students to become CDCs and more course planners to engage with this initiative. The significance of the course consultancy within the institution is that there is a model and a structure in place for students to engage 'early on' in the course and design approval process which has never existed before.

Another intended achievement of this initiative was being received and governed by the Student Voice Committee (SVC). This is a sub-committee of the institution's Student Experience Learning Teaching Committee which, in the end, reports to the Academic Board. SVC is a joint committee of the University and the Hallam Union, co-chaired by the Hallam Union Chief Executive Officer and the University Head of Quality Enhancement who alternate chairing the meetings. SVC has co-secretaries in the Hallam Union, Student Voice Manager, and the University, Senior Quality Officer.

There have also been three positive, unintended effects from this initiative:

1. One CDC who is currently a second-year student conjured and proposed the idea of taking on more of a leadership role in the roll-out of the initiative next year as part of her final-year work-based project. This will be accommodated, and the specifications of this student-lead role are currently being drawn-up.
2. Hallam Union have recently advertised the CDC opportunity to the 1500 student representatives throughout the institution and expressed commitment in opening up this opportunity for student course and faculty representatives.
3. Sheffield Business School, similarly to the Hallam Union, wants their student faculty representatives to have opportunities to take on CDC work.

## **Lessons learned**

There was a risk of not being able to adequately train, support and manage the work of CDCs. This risk was managed by having CDCs being line managed by a student placement officer based in Venture Matrix™. This ensured that the CDCs had everyday line management and a staff member they can turn to immediately in collaborating and corresponding with all involved. Staff within quality enhancement portfolio provided the training in running the workshops and raised their awareness of the institution's course design and approval process. There is, however, room for improvement.

There was a challenge that presented itself early-on in recruiting the necessary four students to conduct the pilot through Venture Matrix™. We only were able to recruit two students from one department. To manage this risk, Sheffield Business School intervened and was able to recruit two student volunteers taken from a pool of faculty student representatives. They volunteered to enhance their own professional development. Moreover, they were participants in the Hallam Award scheme, a co-curricular scheme developed by Hallam Union with support from Sheffield Hallam University to recognise student work in volunteering activities. The Hallam Award is designed to help students reflect on and develop transferable skills that will help them in their University career and beyond.

Significant considerations for next iteration of this initiative:

- Ensure timing of intervention is 'early on' in the design of course. This will encourage dialogue between members of the design team and students;
- Manage expectations of students who participate in workshops;
- Ensure course representative(s) are involved in student workshop. This could ensure continuing dialogue between students and staff even after course approval;
- and, better communication of what is involved for course leader, course planning teams, students and members of faculty approval committees.

## **Next steps**

Short-term –

- define leadership role of Course Design Consultancy;
- stabilise structure of Course Design Consultancy by training student placement officer(s) within Venture Matrix and within Student Learning Services to be line managers for CDCs;



- recruitment of CDCs for next academic year with a view of mainstreaming initiative throughout all faculties. This will require earmarking consultancy to two out of the four faculties not involved in the original pilot;
- the latter point will include setting up a CDC steering group that will include both students and staff.

Medium-term – pilot ways to engage postgraduate students, part-time students and distance-learning students as CDCs. This will entail exploring virtual learning environment and use of Blackboard Collaborate.

Long-term – this model of student consultancy of course design as one method for all courses up for (re)approval to consider in engaging students.

### **Key messages**

- Seek and communicate how an initiative is a 'win-win' for all involved, specifically for students and course design teams;
- Capitalise on existing work-based learning initiatives and/or co-curricular activities within institution to seek student involvement;
- Marry-up initiative to existing institutional strategies. Our CDC initiative was tied to the implementation of the institution's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy and Academic Quality Framework;
- Establish initiative governance across the institution with partnership with student union. Members of the Student Voice Committee have provided valuable insight and direction of initiative.

## Introduction

The mission of the University of Oxford is to achieve and sustain excellence in every area of its teaching and research, enriching communities through the fruits of its research, the skills of its alumni, and the publishing of academic and educational materials. Our initiative was closely aligned with the University's mission: to develop an innovative and high quality programme in teaching and learning by drawing on the skills of alumni to enhance the educational experience of current Master of Science (MSc) students.

The overall aim of this initiative was to embed a new skills training programme in an established MSc course to:

- develop essential practical public health skills for students undertaking a masters in Global Health Science and
- enhance the teaching skills of their 'near peers', the DPhil (PhD) students.

Run by the Department of Public Health in the Medical Sciences Division of the University of Oxford, the [Global Health Science Masters](#) is a one-year course which aims to promote advanced study of the challenges of global health and their solutions so that students may understand and integrate medical, epidemiological, social and economic aspects of ill-health in developing countries. Students come from across the world and almost 40% of these students subsequently pursue research careers and thus doctoral training, many within the department.

## Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

In the rapidly evolving and competitive professional environment, there is a need to ensure that students are able to translate "theoretical knowledge into practice". The initiative focused on practical skills for professional development **OF** masters and doctoral students, developed and delivered **BY** the students **FOR** enhancing their own learning. The objective of the initiative was to improve students' performance in exams and projects of future employment by enhancing three key aspects of student learning experience:

- essential practical public health skills for MSc Global Health Science (MSc GHS) students
- problem based learning and critical thinking for MSc GHS students
- developing and enhancing teaching skills of doctoral students

In addition, the initiative also sought to enhance working relationships between students and staff.

## Approaches and activities developed

The initiative was based on the feedback and suggestions of both MSc GHS alumni who wanted more practical experience and also the departmental doctoral students who wanted teaching opportunities. It was built on existing work – the 'Public Health in Practice' sessions which have been described elsewhere (*Public Health in Practice: translating theory into action*. McHardy K, Ariana P, Plugge E. *Med Educ*. 2011; 45(11):1142), to further develop MSc students' practical skills and enhance the teaching and learning skills of their 'near-peers' (doctoral students). Doctoral students who had recently undertaken the MSc were ideally placed to participate in the curriculum development of the 'Practical Skills Training Programme', although the implementation of the initiative was open to all doctoral students and not limited to the MSc GHS alumni.

The skills training programme focused on developing students' team working, writing, oral presentation and analytical skills through four distinct but complementary strands:

1. Public Health in Practice
2. Presentation skills development
3. Advocacy & debating
4. Evaluation in education

The initiative mainly focused on strands two, three and four whilst ensuring all were sustainable in the long term. Doctoral students delivered the teaching of all strands, having undertaken appropriate training provided by the Medical Sciences Division Skills Training Programme, and were supervised and supported by the course directors. Activities developed and delivered under strands 2, 3 and 4 are described below:

**Strand 2:** The activities under this strand focused on written skills for both MSc assessment essays and academic publications, and on verbal presentation skills. A session on exam writing tips for the MSc GHS students that had been delivered by the MSc alumni doctoral students over the past three years was brought under the umbrella of the 'Practical Skills Training Programme' to enhance its scope and sustainability. In addition, the doctoral students organised an academic writing workshop facilitated by the executive editor of The Lancet (a leading scientific journal), Dr. Bill Summerskill.

The presentation skills component provided the MSc students with first-hand experience of developing and delivering group presentations. This culminated in a seminar series on international health systems and this was run in collaboration with one of the colleges. Twelve of the 22 MSc GHS students participated in the 'Health Systems' seminar series. A doctoral student gave a lecture to all MSc students on presentation skills. The masters students then worked in groups of four and were supported by doctoral students to develop PowerPoint presentations and talking points on three important health systems topics.

**Strand 3:** The activities under strand 3 focused on enhancing the MSc students' ability to put forward reasoned arguments in debate situations and develop their advocacy skills. The remaining 10 of the 22 MSc GHS students participated in two debates examining key public health challenges. These 10 students teamed up with eight students from the Oxford Global Health Group (OGHG), an organized network of students with an interest in global health from various disciplines across the University. The students participating in the debate were supported by doctoral students; they participated in a training session on debating skills organised in the Oxford Union and then received further coaching in small groups.

The MSc GHS students received some advocacy training delivered by external speakers. Jonathan Wood from the Oxford University Press Office talked about media skills required to promote public health campaigns. Modi Mwatsama, the policy manager of the National Heart Forum, spoke about advocacy skills in public health. During the workshop, the students had the opportunity to develop an advocacy strategy for their public health project which they developed as part of their activity under strand 1 ('Public Health in Practice') and receive feedback from the expert panel.

**Strand 4:** A comprehensive evaluation to enhance the quality of the initiative and to provide the student-teachers with an in-depth understanding of this fundamental aspect of good teaching is underway. Initial informal feedback from both DPhil students and MSc students is largely positive.

*"A big thank you to you all, [because] even the opportunity to stand in the Oxford Union was great. You are able to believe in yourself, able to feel more than just a little MSc student. It was difficult to argue on a topic that you don't agree with, but you have to stand for it, and at the end when you come up with evidence, you learn how to critically analyse and push the agenda to others. This is a skill in public health that you need."*

(MSc student)

*"I hope to pursue a career in academia...and one of the major requirements for a successful job application is teaching experience. Traditionally, teaching experience has not been part of the DPhil at Oxford, and I had considered reading for a second PhD back in the US partly because of this limitation. However, the 'Students as Partners' initiative provided a unique hands-on experience in which I was able to support the MSc students*

*towards a common goal in public health: creating more public health practitioners capable of educating the public and other experts with persuasive arguments."*

(Doctoral student)

Apart from the student satisfaction surveys using evaluation forms, an external evaluator from the Oxford Learning Institute will conduct focus group discussion with students. The findings of the evaluation will be used to refine the scope and the curriculum of the initiative such that it can be firmly embedded into the MSc GHS course.

## Resources

The student reports of the 'Health Systems' seminar, their presentations and clips from the audio-podcast will be made available through the MSc GHS webpage. The audio-visual podcast of the two student debates will also be uploaded shortly. We will upload our conference abstracts and presentations, and published papers from the initiative on the website as and when these become available.

## Impact

Overall the 'Practical Skills Training Programme', while complementing the existing curriculum of the MSc GHS course, provided hands-on experience of work environments to the MSc and doctoral students, thus building their capacity to harness the knowledge for professional development. The initiative was successful in that the new curriculum was effectively delivered. Although a thorough evaluation is underway, preliminary conversations with students suggest that the activities of strand 2 and 3, presentation and debate, achieved four intended outcomes for the MSc students:

1. It led the students to critically analyse their theoretical knowledge on global health and health systems to develop reasoned arguments, practical propositions and policy recommendations.
2. Students felt that it developed their team-working skills.
3. They felt it enhanced their public speaking skills.
4. It provided an opportunity to the students to step out of the comfort of their classroom and present to a wider audience through University platforms such as the Oxford Union and the 'Global Health Policy Programme'.

The initiative created avenues to develop teaching and learning skills (curriculum development, delivery and evaluation) for eight doctoral students. In addition, it also provided an opportunity for the doctoral students to polish their organizational and event management skills (organizing seminars, debates, workshops and lectures).

Although the initiative was initially planned to be confined to the department of Public Health and the Medical Sciences Division, it was disseminated more widely across the University and beyond, as was suggested in the first meeting of the Higher Education Academy – Students as Partners. Organizing the Health Systems seminar and the debates jointly with the Oxford Union, the Oxford Global Health Group and the 'Global Health Policy Programme' advertised the events and thus the initiative to a wider audience across the University and beyond. As was commented by the co-founder of the Green Templeton College's 'Global Health Policy Programme':

*"This [the practical skills training programme] is a great idea because it not only gives the students experience of the non-academic but also vitally important skills of organisation, team working and leadership." (Dr. Kenneth A Fleming, International Director, Royal College of Pathologists and co-founder of the Green Templeton College - Global Health Policy Programme).*

Along with the Department of Public Health, we were able to engage two colleges and the Director of the Oxford Learning Institute. In addition, we are submitting abstracts to national and international conferences, writing book chapters and journal articles to disseminate the initiative to the global academic community. One

of the abstracts has already been accepted for presentation at the Faculty of Public Health Annual Conference to be held in July 2013.

The student seminars and debates were highly informative and were appreciated by the wider student and academic community of the University. Thus, apart from improving the teaching and learning skills of the intended doctoral and MSc students, the benefits of the initiative spread University wide, which can be considered as “value added”.

*"A strong feature of the seminars was the contributions by the students, particularly the presenters. I was impressed by how they had researched the topic, analysed the data, designed a presentation, gave the talks and handled the questions. I was particularly impressed by their teamwork. The seminars thus fulfilled a dual purpose of not only examining and illuminating topics of academic interest but also gave the students an important and valuable opportunity to undertake a public presentation." (Dr. Kenneth A Fleming).*

## Lessons learned

There were several lessons learnt from this initiative, but the most important lesson concerned the engagement of the MSc students. During the course of the initiative, the role of the MSc students developed from that of consumers to partners thus feeding into the concept of ‘Students as Partners’; the student partners were not just the doctoral students but the masters students too. We learned the value of constant engagement of the doctoral students with the MSc students through sustained dialogues rather than feedback. While the dialogues helped to address some of the concerns of the MSc students with regards to workload and time management, it helped the doctoral students and the course directors to realistically assess the curriculum and its implementation plan for smooth integration with the existing workload of the MSc students.

In addition, there were a number of key enablers that helped to implement the initiative:

1. Support from the Departmental Head and the Director of Graduate Studies.
2. Tying the initiative with the existing curriculum so that masters students could see the relevance of their efforts to short-term goals such as their examinations as well as the longer term goals of enhanced employability.
3. Demonstrating the ability of the initiative to address two current challenges faced by the Medical Sciences Division and the University as a whole
  - a. Teaching opportunities for doctoral students
  - b. Engaging international students
4. Workload management through distribution of work enabled us to develop and deliver eight activities in six months.
5. Respect for fellow team members whether staff or student was key for team-work. In order for the initiative to work there had to be genuine partnership.
6. Keeping the initiative flexible and open to reasonable suggestions.

## Next steps

Having planned and implemented the ‘Practical Skills Training Programme’, we are now in the process of evaluating the initiative. Shortly after completing the initiative a debriefing session was organised with the four strand leaders, the DPhil students involved in delivering the programme and three student representatives of the MSc cohort. This meeting helped to reflect on the initiative from all angles to refine its scope, curriculum and the time-line for the next cohort.

In the medium term, qualitative evaluations through focus group discussions with two groups of the MSc students will be conducted to assess the impact of the initiative on the learning outcomes of the students. This will also help to understand the perceptions of students related to support by ‘near peers’ (the doctoral students), the added value of the initiative for professional development and whether they perceive the programme to have enhanced their performance in exams and their employability skills. The findings of the

focus group discussion will be used in conjunction with the survey findings to develop a final report. This will be used to review and refine the programme for the 2013-14 academic year, and to identify the key requirements for sustainability of the initiative and to enable replications across other courses and institutions.

The long term goal is to embed this initiative within the MSc GHS curriculum such that it is routinely delivered using a 'Students as Partners' approach. We aim to uphold this initiative as an example for other courses and departments within the University.

### **Key messages**

1. Students are a valuable resource for curriculum development and delivery to enhance their own learning.
2. Respect is the key virtue in team working and coordination between students and teachers.
3. It is important to be flexible and open to new ideas.
4. Communication is key to success of any initiative.
5. Keeping the initiative small meant that it was feasible and therefore could be delivered effectively. Initial success will enable us to build further

## Introduction

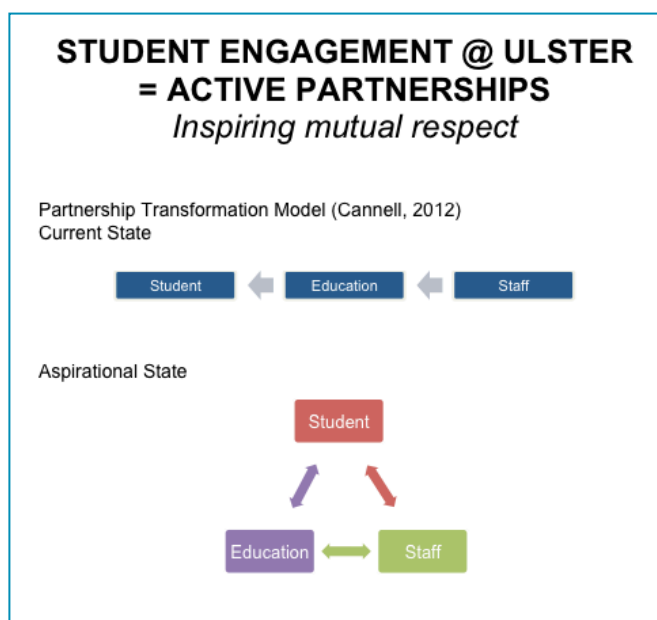
At Ulster, the Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP) and the Students' Union have been collaborating on a number of initiatives which aim to engender a partnership approach to enhancing the student experience. For example, students are being encouraged to influence the design and delivery of the curriculum through Students' Union facilitated workshops and focus groups which elicit feedback on the student experience, this valuable feedback is fed back to course teams who are working on designing curricula. Alongside this initiative, the Students' Union has also played an active role in recent working groups comprising academics, students and other professionals: for example, on Assessment and Feedback which developed Ulster's Principles of Assessment and Feedback for Learning. Subsequently, a guide, for students, by students, has been developed, 'Focus on Feedback' which succinctly describes what feedback is, and how it can be used. Another example is that of the University study skills working group which developed an online study skills resource for both staff and students.

Involvement in the HEA Students as Partners Change Programme (SaP) was a timely opportunity to; build on the partnerships established between staff in CHEP and the Students' Union and, for the SaP team to develop a strategic aim for Student Engagement at Ulster for consideration by students, staff and senior management.

## Aspect(s) of the student learning experience the initiative sought to enhance

The initial aim of the project was to develop a staged model of student engagement; the first stage involving students in the curriculum i.e. **in** their learning, with the focus targeted at first year engagement and then secondly, the engagement of students in **shaping** the design and delivery of the curriculum. It was posited that in doing this students will then be in a better position to become true partners and be better able to become constructively involved in curriculum design and co-creators of their learning experiences. The SaP team originally planned to develop a guide for first year students on 'becoming a learner in higher education' similar in design to the 'Focus on Feedback' guide. A corresponding resource for staff was planned to provide guidance and support on facilitating student engagement through active and collaborative learning. However, through discussions with our Mentor (Professor Stuart Brand, Birmingham City University) at an initial meeting of the team and subsequently at the two-day residential which was held in the early part of the change programme, it became clear that this was an opportunity to develop a more overarching aim for Student Engagement which could influence the University's new Teaching and Learning Strategy, which was being consulted on in 2012-13.

## Approaches and activities developed



At the two-day residential, the SaP team engaged in a range of activities which promoted creative thinking on how to 'package' Student Engagement at a strategic level which would still embrace the two staged approach of; involving students in the curriculum i.e. **in** their learning and, the engagement of students in **shaping** the design and delivery of the curriculum. The SaP team were supported in doing this by their mentor, Professor Brand and the HEA Change Academy team

The main outcome from this was a model that would see students moving from passive recipients of knowledge in the classroom, to active learners and participants in co-creating knowledge and curriculum development approaches with staff.



Consultation with senior management, staff and students followed and this took various forms. The SaP team wished to elicit opinions of, and reactions to, the notion of student engagement as active partnerships and to identify existing practice which embodied partnerships between staff and students. This was done through a series of activities/events:

- CHEP Annual Conference
- The 'Big Conversation' - Teaching and Learning Strategy Consultation
- Students' Union Conference

### [CHEP Annual Conference – January 2013](#)

The annual CHEP Conference titled, Students as Partners: a catalyst for transformative change was an opportunity to present the emerging model of student engagement at Ulster. A key aspect of this conference was that students were encouraged to co-present with staff and to attend as delegates. The two keynote speakers were joined in co-delivery with their students. Colin Bryson and Millie Williams (final-year student) from Newcastle University co-presented a talk – Student Engagement; examining its foundations and fruitful ways of putting it into practice. Professor Stuart Brand and Jaime Morris (final-year student) from Birmingham City University co-presented – Student employability for enhancement. In addition, there were parallel sessions incorporating papers, pecha kuchas and workshops which disseminated a wide variety of effective practice related to the theme. The conference culminated with an expert panel made up of students, an NUS delegate and the keynotes speakers.

Delegates (staff and students) were asked to reflect on themes discussed and in particular to provide feedback on the proposed model presented by the SaP team using a short questionnaire which was included in the conference pack. Of the 200 delegates in attendance, 72 responses were received. In summary, almost 85% were positive in response to their initial reaction to the concept of 'students as partners' with a large percentage stating that they are already doing it. However, the SaP team have noted from the responses in relation to enablers and barriers that challenges lie ahead for the institution in relation to; resources, a perceived resistance to culture change, and the language and terminology around partnerships.

### [The 'Big Conversation' - Teaching and Learning Strategy Consultation – January 2013](#)

Following the conference the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching and Learning began a three-staged consultation on the new Strategy. A significant component of this consultation was gauging reactions to the language of students as partners and adopting this approach as an institution.

The Big Conversation was part of the pre-consultation phase, and events held on each of the University's four campuses in January 2013, proved to be extremely productive and the comments and views expressed have been reflected in the first draft of the Strategy.

Draft Strategic Aim I of the Strategy

**To promote meaningful staff student partnerships that engender a shared responsibility for transformative, high quality, learning experiences**

Formal Consultation and Committee Consideration (Stage II) will end in April 2013, and Formal Approval (Stage III) will occur in June 2013.

### [Students' Union Conference – Are students at Ulster 'Partners in their Learning?' – March 2013](#)

The Students' Union took a similar approach in consulting students on this issue. In March a student conference was held and forty student delegates attended from across the four campuses.



Kate Little, Quality and Student Engagement Consultant from the Student Engagement Team within the National Union of Students (NUS) was invited to deliver a workshop, and to also participate in a panel debate with Professor McAlister, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning). Through her workshop, Kate provided an outline of the background and drivers of moving from Student Engagement to the concept of Partnership. Delegates were provided with the NUS document “A Manifesto for Partnership” and discussions centred on the definition of partnerships within Higher Education; Institutional Change; the importance of Students Unions; accounting for heterogeneity and the rejection of consumerism.

Students were asked to identify possible drivers and threats in their own institutions, and these were recorded to inform the SU response to the Learning and Teaching Strategy consultation.

At the end of the event students were given similar questionnaires to those distributed at the CHEP Conference, requesting feedback on the themes of the day. Students were asked for their initial reaction to ‘students as partners’; 23 out of 24 respondents replied either positively, or that they felt their course already contained elements of partnership. Several barriers were identified, such as a lack of staff and student engagement with this approach, and also a lack of trust between staff and students.

### Resources

- The following resources have been referred to by the SaP team in this case study.
- The Ulster Principles of Assessment & Feedback  
[http://ee.ulster.ac.uk/assessment\\_and\\_feedback/vb](http://ee.ulster.ac.uk/assessment_and_feedback/vb)
- Focus on Feedback, A Guide to Feedback produced by students for students:  
[http://www.uusu.org/news/360903/news\\_focus\\_on\\_feedback\\_05022013/](http://www.uusu.org/news/360903/news_focus_on_feedback_05022013/)

### Resources Developed:

- CHEP conference: Information on the event and presentations are available on the CHEP website  
<http://www.ulster.ac.uk/centrehep/conference.html>
- Draft University of Ulster Learning & Teaching strategy:  
[http://www.ulster.ac.uk/centrehep/teaching\\_and\\_learning\\_strategy/](http://www.ulster.ac.uk/centrehep/teaching_and_learning_strategy/)

### **Impact**

The events described above, along with the evidence generated and the subsequent strategic conversations with senior management have led to a commitment within the draft Learning and Teaching Strategy (2013/14 – 2017/18) at Ulster to the development of students as partners. Once the approval stage is complete both CHEP and the Students’ Union will be working together to promote further partnerships to enhance the learning experience.

The CHEP conference has also generated a rich resource of examples of partnership working, which can be disseminated as effective practice to teams across the institution. The consultation was very timely and enabled us to establish a baseline of initial reactions to the notion of ‘students as partners’ as well as to highlight particular challenges that this presents.

Positive responses from staff and students on ‘students as partners’ included the following:

- Right way forward to develop a better and more friendly Student Environment
- Good idea - students may find it easier to communicate their thoughts without intimidation thus improving learning experience
- I like the option - but will require a lot of willingness between students and lecturers
- Really good if put into practice
- We are worth something, not just a number

- Great when a University is student led - good student initiative - attractive to potential students - feel more involved (not just a number)
- The way forward - an active partnership between students & staff key in developing the learning environment and working relationships
- Positive response - I am not just a number
- Great opportunity for students to get more involved in terms of things that need improvement
- Exciting concept with many benefits for the University - very interesting to see how it develops in the future
- Very positive and has lots of benefits for the University as a whole
- Made to feel equal / Students views will be taken into consideration /
- Great concept as we can work together to improve the University to get what is best for us
- Positive
- Great, makes us feel like equals. Students should have a say in all aspects of their student experience as they are paying for it. We deserve the best
- 100% Agree - for it to work successfully the University and Union need to work together to bring these factors into action asap

Less positive responses from staff and students included the following:

- Nice concept, but obviously we are not in an equal partnership. In general good degree of interaction with most staff
- Unsure about what it mean
- Great in theory - concept needs actual strategies, plans and actions
- Great, wish it was taken more into account, as not currently the case in my class

Our involvement in the 'Students as Partners' change programme and other associated activities which involve students as co-creators in solutions to challenging problems will be capitalised on through Ulster's involvement in the What Works? Student Retention & Success Change Programme (2013-2016).

## **Lessons learned**

Think big! - As can be seen from this account of practice, the original proposal was for a quite small-scale project which whilst it would have useful, thinking more creatively and strategically has enabled us to influence an institutional strategy from which we can build upon.

The actual process of working in partnership i.e. student and staff partners is not necessarily a natural one and something that requires further debate to explore its challenges and benefits. The SaP team have engaged a researcher external to the team to conduct an evaluation of the process and data from this will be very beneficial to senior managers, staff and students. Preliminary data analysed suggests that cognisance needs to be taken of; the use of language particularly acronyms and/or very academic terms; understanding by the whole team of the aims and objectives; feelings around belongingness to the team and general team dynamics.

As one of several institutions taking part in this Change Programme, the value of networking should not be under estimated. We have had the opportunity to interact with colleagues from a range of universities and in particular, we have had several discussions around potential future projects with Birmingham City University.

## **Next steps**

Ulster's involvement in the What Works? Student Retention & Success Change Programme (2013-2016) will allow us to further embed practice around staff and student partnerships.

A research project 2013-2015 with the aim - to develop a framework for student and staff partnership in a higher education institution

Paper submissions to relevant conferences

A review of structure following the approval of the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy in order to explore enablers to enhancing CHEP and SU partnerships.

## **Key messages**

The value of shared discourse should not be underestimated – we all have ideas shaped by our own priorities and experiences and this can lead us to taking a narrow view of the way forward. Through debating ideas and listening to each other, respecting the diversity of perspectives we can achieve so much more.

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